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SUBJECT: LATVIA-RUSSIA SIGN AGREEMENT TO RETURN SPENT NUCLEAR FUEL TO RUSSIA

¶1. Summary: On December 3, the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation signed an agreement to return remaining spent nuclear fuel from Latvia's decommissioned Salaspils research facility to Russia for recycling and storage. The agreement stems from efforts in Latvia started in the late 1990's by the U.S. Department of Energy, as part of a wider program to return radioactive materials from ex-Soviet sites outside of Russia to Russian government control. End summary.

¶2. On December 3, The Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation signed an agreement to send remaining used nuclear fuel from Latvia's decommissioned Salaspils nuclear research facility to Russia. The agreement was signed in Moscow by Environment Minister Raimonds Vejonis, on behalf of Latvia, and for Russia by Sergei Kiriyenko, Head of the Federal Atomic Energy Agency of Russia.

¶3. The spent nuclear fuel, currently stored at the former Salaspils research facility (which was closed in the late nineties and is now maintained by the Latvian State Hazardous Waste Management Agency), is planned to be transported to Russia in 2008. The spent nuclear fuel will be recycled in Russia and all nuclear waste resulting from recycling will stay in its possession. Latvia will, however, have to pay for managing the storage of the waste.

¶4. The return of the fuel is part of the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Global Threat Reduction Initiative, and according to reports of the deal, the U.S. Department of Energy will cover transportation costs for the spent fuel. U.S.-Latvian collaboration began in 1997, when the U.S. Department of Energy and the Latvian Nuclear Research Center completed a joint effort aimed at improving and upgrading the security of nuclear fuel stored at Salaspils. With the assistance of the International Atomic Energy Agency and Russian authorities, further Salaspils work continued in 2005, when three kilograms of highly enriched uranium that could be used for nuclear weapons were returned to Russia.
¶5. The Latvian Environment Ministry reportedly plans to spend 372,000 lats ($770,000 USD) to cover its share of the 2008 operation. The Salaspils scientific research reactor inherited from the Soviet Union was shut down in 1998, and the dismantling of the reactor is planned to be completed by 2010.
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